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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER SIDELINES OLD GUARD AND
CONSOLIDATES POWER FOLLOWING PARTY COUNCIL MEETING

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Nicholas J. Dean. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY
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¶1. (C) When General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam unveiled the new AL Central Committee July 30 it became apparent that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was no longer willing to "forgive, but not forget" those who betrayed her during the two-year Caretaker Government. Four senior party leaders were dropped from the Awami League Presidium, while a number of mid-level officials also lost their positions in the Central Committee. The following day, Hasina appointed six new members to her Cabinet and reshuffled the portfolios of four existing Ministers. Her appointments, both to the new Central Committee and the Cabinet, continued the trend of elevating relative unknowns which she began with the original Ministerial appointments in January. Hasina declared that the new appointments pointed to the future of the party and the government and said the new Ministers had been chosen to implement her government's agenda. Most observers agreed that Hasina had succeeded in further consolidating her grip on the party, perhaps at the expense of the government's efficiency.

Awami League Council Puts Its Faith in Hasina
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¶2. (C) The Representation of the People's Ordinance of 2008, subsequently ratified by Bangladesh's Parliament with minor changes during its first sitting, required Bangladesh's political parties to amend their constitutions as a condition for registration by the Election Commission. The RPO further required the political parties to hold Council Meetings within 180 days to ratify the amendments. After first signaling that it would seek an extension, the ruling Awami League instead hastily organized a Council Meeting on July 24, the first such meeting in seven years. In addition to ratifying the amendments to its party constitution, the Councilors were charged with electing a party President, General Secretary, and Central Committee.

Reformist Wins Out for AL General Secretary
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¶3. (C) While it was no surprise that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would be re-elected AL President, there were several contenders for the post of General Secretary going into the party conclave. In a victory for true reformers, former Joint General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam was elevated to the General Secretary post, replacing veteran party leader Abdul Jalil who resigned days ahead of the Council Meeting. Ashraf's main rival, fellow Joint General Secretary Obaidul Kader, was subsequently elevated to the Awami League's

Presidium. Ashraf's father, Awami League Vice President Syed Nazrul Islam, was killed in Dhaka Central Jail in November 1975 along with three other senior AL leaders. During the CTG period, Ashraf served as Acting General Secretary while Jalil and Kader were imprisoned on corruption charges.

Democratic Centralism Trumps Party Constitution =====

13. (C) According to the AL constitution, Councilors were charged with electing 47 of the 73 members of the party executive committee, leaving the President the responsibility of choosing 26 others in consultation with the Presidium within 21 days of the party Council Meeting. Instead, at this year's party conclave Councilors gave the Party President and General Secretary the responsibility for filling all the slots. This decision provoked some grumbling from party members and criticism from the media, who questioned why the ruling party had ignored one of the central tenets of its newly approved constitution.

New AL Central Committee Sidelines Old Guard "Reformers" =====

14. (C) For almost a week after the Council Meeting, Dhaka's political elite speculated about the fate of party "reformers" who had conspired with the Army during the Caretaker Government period to sideline Hasina. Most speculation centered on the fate of veteran Parliamentarians Abdur Razzak, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, and Suranjit Sen Gupta--collectively known as the R.A.T.S. Others seen as vulnerable included party organizing secretaries Saber

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Hossain Chowdhury and his six colleagues. Most observers expected Hasina to make examples of at least some reformers, but few believed she would take on all of them at once. In particular, Razzak and Sen Gupta appeared to many to be safe, given their long-standing ties to India. As the days passed following the Council Meeting, one Minister told us that "only God and Sheikh Hasina" knew what would happen.

Decapitating the Disloyal =====

15. (C) Hasina decided to send a clear message regarding the price to be paid for disloyalty, removing all four "RATS" from the Presidium and dumping all seven previous Organizing Secretaries. The four senior leaders were relegated to the ceremonial party Advisory Committee. In their places, Hasina elevated Ministers Razi Uddin Ahmed Razu, Abdul Latif Siddique, and Sahara Khatun, as well as Kader and Satish Chandra Roy to the Presidium. Hasina filled two of three Joint General Secretary positions, nominating Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni and Mahbub al Alam Hanif as Ashraf's deputies. Of the new Organizing Secretaries, only State Minister Jahangir Kabir Nanak was well known prior to his elevation. Hanif's main qualification seemed to be his family relationship to one of Hasina's cousins, whose father was also killed along with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975.

Cabinet Reshuffle Again Rewards Loyalty Over Experience =====

16. (C) For weeks the media has speculated about an impending Cabinet reshuffle. From her first Cabinet Meeting in January, Hasina had warned Ministers they would be judged based on their performance and could lose their jobs if they failed to perform. Many speculated that Hasina would be forced to admit senior party leaders from the AL and its coalition partners into the Cabinet as part of a reshuffle. Some thought that Hasina would offer Cabinet positions to the RATS in order to preempt any attempts to cause problems within the party after losing their seats in the Presidium. The need for a reshuffle became more pressing once State

Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj resigned from the Cabinet, leaving a key vacancy to be filled.

Unknowns Elevated, Portfolios Reshuffled

17. (C) Hasina again defied conventional wisdom July 31 with the appointment of six relative unknowns to the Council of Ministers. The new Cabinet Members included Members of Parliament Shahjahan Khan, Promod Mankin, Mujibur Rahman Fakir, Mahbubur Rahman, Enamul Haque and Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury. At the same time, Hasina reshuffled the portfolio of four existing Ministers, leaving the following lineup:

Newly Appointed:

Shipping: Minister Shahjahan Khan
Energy and Power: State Minister Brig (ret) Enamul Haq
Cultural Affairs: State Minister Promod Mankin
Health and Family Welfare: State Minister Mujibur Rahman Fakir
Water Resources: State Minister Mahbubur Rahman
Women and Children's Affairs: State Minister Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury

Reassigned:

Primary and Mass Education: Minister Afsarul Amin (from Shipping)
Home Affairs: State Minister Shamsul Haque Tuku (from Energy)
Environment: State Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud (from Foreign Affairs)
Land: State Minister Mustafizur Rahman Fizar (from Environment)

Cabinet Expanded

18. (C) With the new inductions, Hasina's Cabinet grew to include 24 Ministers and 18 State Ministers. In addition, she has appointed seven Advisers with Ministerial rank, including recently appointed Foreign Affairs Adviser Dr. Gowher Rizvi. The Cabinet included two Buddhists, one Hindu,

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and with the addition of Promod Mankin, one Christian. The appointment of Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury increased the number of female Cabinet members to six. While larger than her Cabinet during the 1996 - 2001 period, Hasina has not reached the level set by the previous BNP-led government, which included a record 60 members in the Council of Ministers. Of note, despite the warnings to Cabinet Members that they would be judged based on their performance, Hasina chose not to drop any Ministers as part of the reshuffle.

Comment

19. (C) With the formation of the new party Central Committee and the expansion of the Cabinet, Hasina has underscored the premium she places on loyalty. While some party stalwarts dropped from the Central Committee and excluded from the Cabinet were guilty of actively conspiring against Hasina, others were apparently dropped for not being sufficiently loyal--sins of omission rather than commission. Even some of Hasina's closest allies fear the AL leader may have gone too far by dropping so many senior leaders in one blow. By promoting so many new leaders, most of whom have little or no executive experience, Hasina is taking a significant risk. At the same time, Hasina has sent the message (intentional or not) that more than ever, all power is concentrated in her hands. In our view, the biggest risk Hasina runs by surrounding herself with loyalists is that nobody will be able or willing to speak up when she is about to make a

mistake. On the plus side, Hasina has clearly indicated her choices for future leadership of the party. Meanwhile, all eyes will turn to the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party as it begins the process leading towards its Party Council later this year. Many are asking whether BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will follow Hasina's lead and banish the reformists in her party's midst.

MORIARTY